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MR. PENNELL'S ETCHINGS OF NEW YORK "SKY SCRAPERS"

NC
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P4
K58
1905

BY

FREDERICK KEPPEL

FREDERICK KEPPEL & CO.
4 EAST 39TH STREET, NEW YORK
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MR. PENNELL'S ETCHINGS OF NEW YORK "SKY SCRAPERS"

PERHAPS no artist now living and working has less need of an introduction to the American public than Mr. Joseph Pennell. His age is now only forty-five and yet it would be difficult to name any other man who has given us so many enjoyable pictures of such fine artistic quality.

At the invitation of the authorities at the St. Louis Exposition Mr. Pennell went from London to St. Louis, where he served as Chairman of the Jury on Illustration and Engraving, and returning eastward by way of Philadelphia—his native city—he came on to us here in New York. His stay with us was brief, because, as usual, he was wanted in Europe, where important commissions awaited him.

Arrived in New York, Mr. Pennell's experience has been similar to what it was in the many European countries whose scenes he has depicted. He cares as little as ever for the recognized "show-pieces,"—just as little as Whistler him-

self cared,— and says of our Old City Hall, Grace Church, and the Central Park that t are all very well in their way, but that the s things, or things very similar, may be seer almost any other civilized capital; but the tov ing piles of the New York "sky scrapers' each one of them like a whole street set on — have impressed Mr. Pennell very stron and these absolute novelties in etched pict are what we now exhibit. Their collective may seem to lack the dignity of prim formal but yet a recent writer in Paris has issue treatise which it pleases him to entitle " Sky-*scratchers* de New York"!

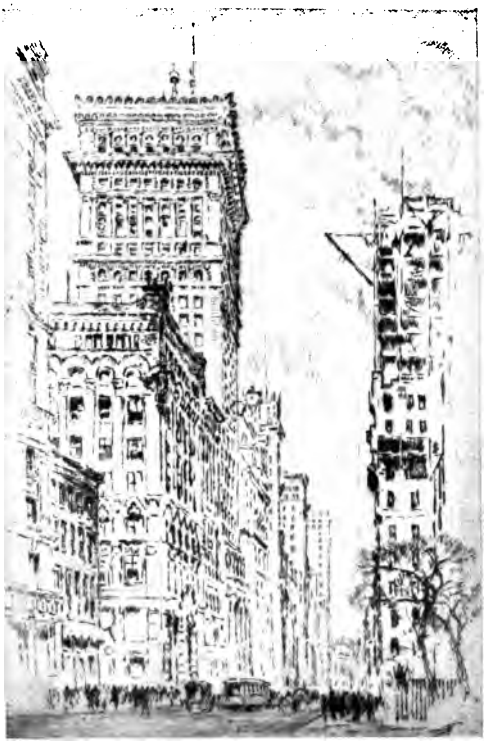
These recent etchings of Mr. Pennell's instinct with the quality which both Whis and Sir Seymour Haden have always maintai to be the prime characteristic of the best pain etching — namely, spontaneity; and what W tler wrote a few years ago about Mr. Penn Spanish lithographs might with equal truth said of these "sky scrapers": "There crispness in their execution, and a lightness gaiety in their arrangement as pictures, that long to the artist alone."

This impromptu spontaneity of Mr. Penn method carries with it one little drawback— be a drawback at all. It is, that in his ar

The "L" and the Trinity Building.

The Four-story House.

The Stock Exchange.



"The Golden Cornice" (100 Broadway).

tectural scenes what the French call the *orientation* is reversed: west is east and east is west. In this he follows the precedent of both Rembrandt and Whistler. The sole preoccupation of these masters was to produce a *picture*, and they cared not at all to provide a topographical plan of some stated locality. The artist etches his subject on the copper plate just as he sees it, and in the printing of the proofs the *orientation* is, of course, reversed. But if any over-scrupulous person wishes to see one of Whistler's Venice etchings, or one of Pennell's New York plates, exactly as the original buildings represented stand, he has only to hold the etching before a mirror and look at the reflection. Or, to satisfy all tastes, a set of the etchings has been printed on very transparent paper and mounted back outward so as to show the buildings as they actually stand.

John Ruskin, when once invited to visit the United States, declared that he could not exist in a country which contained no ancient castles; but with us in America, where "the greatest good to the greatest number" is the wholesome rule, such sentimentality is generally swept aside: down comes the inconvenient old building and up goes a much better one in its place. But it must not be supposed for these reasons

that our contemporary architects are not genuine artists also. Mr. Pennell certainly has discerned art in their "sky scrapers," and so competent a judge as Mr. F. Marion Crawford, on seeing these etchings, made the pithy remark, "I see that you have made Architecture of the New York buildings." He *has*, and yet he has depicted them truly.

Still another authority of high repute has given his opinion thus: "In whatever he does he is always the *artist;* and now that Whistler is dead and Seymour Haden no longer etching, I consider that the ablest painter-etcher now living and working is unquestionably Joseph Pennell."

FREDERICK KEPPEL.

February, 1905.

Union Square and the Bank of the Metropolis.

The Times Building.